

Biography of Robert Hugh Tanner 1915 - 2002

Robert H. (Bob) Tanner received his B. Sc. in Electrical Engineering and his M. Sc. in Acoustics from Imperial College of Science and Technology in London, England, and began his career with the British Broadcasting Corporation as a pioneer in the world's first high definition television station developing audio techniques and researching the acoustics of studios and concert halls. Following service in the Royal Signals during WWII, Bob emigrated to Canada with his young family in 1947 where he commenced an outstanding engineering career with Northern Electric in Belleville, Ontario. He moved to Ottawa in 1960 where he helped found Northern Electric's research and development division, Bell Northern Research, and subsequently the Canadian Department of Communications.

He contributed to Canadian engineering in many fields, managing the development of products and systems from audio equipment to microwave relay stations. His skill as an engineer and a manager was recognized by his appointment in 1973 as Director of Industrial Research of the Canadian Department of Communications.

In 1975, after leaving the Department of Communications in Ottawa, Robert, with his wife Joan, moved to Naples, Florida, where he became a consultant - as an accomplished acoustical engineer - and carried out the acoustical design of many important buildings, including the Royal Canadian Mint in Ottawa, the Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres in Toronto as well as an Air Force Academy in Saudi Arabia, the new Canadian Embassy in Washington, and the Philharmonic Hall in Naples.

He was active for many years in the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) and its predecessor society IRE (Institute of Radio Engineers). He joined the I.R.E. in 1938, became a Senior Member in 1948 and a Fellow in 1958. In 1955, he helped to found the Bay of Quinte Section, and after moving to Ottawa became Section Chairman there in 1965. [Note: IRE and AIEE merged in 1963 to form IEEE.] He was also Secretary Treasurer of Region 7 from 1963 to 1967. He was elected Regional Director in 1968, and conceived the plan to divide Canada into three Councils; this plan led to the Area system now adopted throughout IEEE. He also led the establishment of the Region 7 (later IEEE Canada) awards program by initiating the presentation of the A.G.L. MacNaughton Gold Medal in 1969. He was appointed Institute Secretary in 1970, and elected [Executive] Vice-President in 1971. He was elected IEEE President in 1972 - becoming the first Canadian member to hold this high office.

During his year of office as IEEE President, he set up the U.S. Activities Committee (then USAB and subsequently IEEE USA), and steered the Constitutional Amendment on professional activities through the Board of Directors to an over-whelming acceptance by the membership. Since 1972 he has remained active on several Institute committees. He was one of the founding directors of the IEEE Foundation – serving on the Board from 1972 to 1985. Bob Tanner was the principal author of the first IEEE long range planning report. It spelled out an evolution for IEEE regions to become self governing.

Bob Tanner received several prestigious awards. IEEE Canada (then IEEE Region 7) awarded him the A.G.L. MacNaughton Gold Medal for exemplary contributions to the engineering profession in 1974. IEEE awarded him the Haraden Pratt Award for Service in 1981 – his citation reads 'for contributions toward professionalism and dedicated service to the Canadian Region, to the IEEE, and to the profession over many years'. In 1989, Concordia University in Montreal bestowed on him an Honorary LL.D. for his services to engineering.